

# **KNIGHTMARE'S GAME**



# Knightmare's Game

ACT 1

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Bald and Bonkers Network LLC

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## CITY OF ANGELS?

It is just after dark in a Los Angeles diner, as the staff enjoyed a slow shift. Customers who visit *Carrie's* enjoy a traditional 50s atmosphere and award-winning food. On an average day, the average patron will be greeted by teenage lovers, average businessmen, and occasional surprises from actors starting out and ones practically everyone can recognize. Every now and then, a representative of nearby music labels will attend weekly karaoke nights, hoping to find the next hopeful musician to seduce their ears. Between the months of January and April,

the infamous pilot season, the diner is usually filled with prideful hopefuls in town looking for their chance to make it into the next big sitcom or be the next A-Lister so they can rub their winnings in the noses of all who doubted them.

Perhaps that is a poor choice of phrasing. However, this was still LA. A city of dreams in which anyone willing to put in exemplary work and find themselves on the generous end of Lady Luck can become something almost unrecognizable.

As such, with any large grouping of sentient beings, less-than-desirable traits always find a way to come to the surface and permanently scar unfortunate onlookers.

Perhaps that was why everyone grew tense when a rather large man in a black wool trenchcoat, red button-up shirt, dark jeans, and black steel-toed boots entered the diner for the fifth time this week. It



was hard not to imagine why the unsuspecting spectators would feel a bit intimidated as the man's frame seemed to fill the entire edge of the door. The top of which seemed close to scalping him was it not for his occasional habit of slouching. It was also probably a good thing the man had a cleanly shaven-head. The metal frame had a tendency to catch loose hairs in its static pull or within the tiny chips in the structure that reflected its age. Aside from his choice of clothing and Viking-like figure, there was not much to give anyone the impression the man was dangerous. Unless you were witness for maybe a couple of occasions where local gangsters harassing the waitresses suddenly acted more respectfully at the sound of the man clearing his throat.

A waitress emerged from the back of the diner. She pulls out a small notepad from one of the pockets in her apron as she follows the man. He is glimpsing at a folded-up newspaper he fetched from a stand next to

the entrance. He walks over to a booth in the back of the diner. A common tactic to give him a private view of the place with minimal risk of an attack from behind. He moves his free hand below the gap of his jacket and brushes it upwards as he takes his seat.

"Can I get you anything, big guy?" she asked.

"How about that chicken BLT on white, some tots, and a coke?" the man suggested as he glanced at her nametag, "Thank you kindly, Ms. Scarlett."

"You know, you keep coming here and know my name, but yet I don't know yours?" Scarlett perked.

"David," the man smirked.

"Tell me then, you keep coming cause you want to get my number, or you looking for somebody?"

David glanced towards a clock just above the kitchen counter as one of the other servers reached for an elderly man's order of fresh apple pie and strawberry smoothie. His focus on the hands of the clock seemed to make it strain, inching closer, as David knew something was about to happen. The part that worried him most? The innocent lives that might get caught in the crossfire of a local gangbanger, compromised by the use of illegal narcotics, burst through the door with an H & K MP5K automatic pistol. He fired a series of shots straight into the clock's face.

The diner patrons all scatter and duck to avoid being struck by stray gunfire, all except David and Scarlett. Upon realizing the man's true intentions that burst into the diner, David burst from his seat, nearly breaking the table from the screws which held it to the tile floor. David quickly grabbed Scarlett and forced her underneath him as they

fell into the booth. It was the only way to ensure she would be sheltered by his large frame. Scarlett's body tried to shake from the sudden shock of being in the middle of a shooting. However, she found herself hardly able to move under David's weight.

"Stay down until I get him out of the building," David muttered.

Scarlett would've found relief from the added pressures of a large man removing himself from on top of her. However, the shock of the incident still riddled her heart at dangerous rates. She watched, slowly feeling her mind regress to the state of a young girl. As she saw the kind stranger she happened to meet at work one time, grasp the backs of the closest stool near the counter and strike the assailant across the chest. The blow sent the attacker flying towards the metal door of the diner, nearly blasting it off its hinges. More deafening shots were fired as the trauma, and likely rib-shattering

smack forced the muscles in the attacker's arms and hands to seize. The injury rippled through the man's upper body, causing him to yank the trigger and fire more rounds into the ceiling. Scarlett watched in amazement that paralleled her fear. It was almost like she was witnessing a real-life superhero.

The diner's patrons gathered towards the front windows, hoping to catch a glimpse of the show. And what a show it was! David towered over the purple-haired, five-foot-nine, one-hundred-sixty-pound attacker. He was not afraid to utilize the difference in size as he continued his brutal assault. It was hard for anyone to hear the conversation from inside the diner, except for one sentence David roared with inhuman rage.

"Where is Knightmare?!"

The attacker was hard to understand in his cries, but all who spectated knew without a

doubt that an answer was not provided as the attacker screamed, "Go fuck yourself!"

Onlookers passing on the street realized what was unfolding. They began to take in the spectacle themselves, some taking out their phones to record all that was happening. One woman cried for someone to call the police, only to realize by the sounds of quickly approaching sirens that someone or something already did. Feeling as if he was being backed into a corner, David knew he would have to reveal a few other tricks he had up his sleeve.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and grabbed the attacker by the throat. David's nails dug into the man's flesh, drawing even more blood not shed from the earlier assaults. As for the attacker's gun? It was rendered useless as the entire magazine was spent inside the diner, a move David had planned. The wind surrounding them emerged from nowhere and grew stronger.

The sudden storm seemed in synch with the sudden distortions in the air that originated from David, like a mirage causing a desert highway to appear to flow like waves in the ocean.

"WHERE IS KNIGHTMARE?!" David roared louder.

"I don't know," pleaded the man.

David, growing tired of the man's alleged ignorance, lifts him to eye level and tightens his grip. The automatic pistol falls from the man's grip and onto the asphalt by David's side 18 feet as David leans near the man's ear and whispers something. The distortion around him seemed to become more intense. The wind blew stronger, police drew closer, and nearly all the spectators scrambled in fear. Some even felt afraid for the man, as clearly the danger was no match for the supernatural horror he was pissing off. Evidently, this was the case as the anger of

the superhuman giant began to manifest as a consuming flame that started to burn the would-be robber from head to toe.

The screams and pork-like smell of burning human flesh broke Scarlett free from her trance, and for reasons unknown to her, she ran outside, hoping to get David's attention.

"STOP IT!"

Scarlett's scream echoed as tears began to pour from her eyes. David's focus shifts towards her, not realizing that he has gone into a state of utter focus, causing only a fraction of his abilities to emerge. Sudden guilt for causing Scarlett begins to fill his heart, and a blinding white light appears, dumbfounding all who witness it. Even the police became paralyzed by the light's magnificence as they emerged from their patrol cars.

Minutes, which felt like hours, passed before the light suddenly disappeared. Those



entirely blinded by it found all that remained was the would-be robber resting on his knees with his hands up in the air. As tears rolled down the man's face, all witnesses to the violence became amazed when they realized the man's fresh wounds were completely healed. His physical condition was exactly as it was when he entered the diner. As for his weapon, the police quickly found that the parts necessary for the gun to fire were melted.

As for Scarlett, she knew in her heart what she had seen but was too afraid to admit it. The police began to process the scene as another waitress ran outside.

"Scarlett, babe, are you alright?" she yelled, running to comfort her coworker.

"I don't know, Georgia," Scarlett choked, "What the hell just happened?"

While Scarlett was a beautiful 26-year-

old blonde Hollywood hopeful from Boise, Idaho. Georgia, a 54-year-old Los Angeles native. The pair was almost like a mother and daughter, a relationship that honestly caught them both by surprise. Georgia was an actress until one fateful night, she lost her husband and her then 8-year-old son in a car accident. The other driver in that accident was heavily intoxicated, ejected from the vehicle, and died on the scene. Georgia was the only survivor, forever marked with crippling memories of her family and sporadic seizures from the neurological damage she treated with prescription CBD oil. The diner was a saving grace for her, a simple job that allowed her to have some money coming in on top of her disability. It also provided a reason to leave the house.

When Scarlett came to town and got a job at the diner, Georgia perhaps saw a bit of herself in the young hopeful, which led to her offering up her late son's old room. Georgia was even kind enough to offer

advice and aid to Scarlett whenever auditions came around. At first, such a bond seemed strange to some until they learned that her son, Wyatt, would've been the same age as Scarlett. Georgia even joked that she could see Scarlett and Wyatt being a cute couple. Finding such a connection seemed hard to do in such a chaotic world. Little did they know that tie would be the one thing to help them cope with what was to come.

"I think," Georgia pondered, "I think that was the 'Dragon' guy from the news."

"What?" Scarlett shook her head, "What 'Dragon guy' are you talking about?"

Realizing that the young girl she considered a daughter was still in shock, Georgia wrapped her arm around Scarlett's shoulder. Then starts to lead her back inside the diner to wait for the police to question them. It was an overwhelming night for them all. A night that would've been even more frightening

had they looked towards the sky to see a tall black and red figure watching them from the top of a nearby building. Perhaps it was best that Scarlett and Georgia only realized much more was about to unfold when they discovered a business card and a note on the table David sat at. Still trying to process all they had just witnessed, they could only look once the first two words of the note were readable from a distance.

"I'm sorry."

So much for the City of Angels...

## 2

### **DRIP. DRIP.**

Drip. Drip.

A young woman stands above a bathroom sink, applying various bits of darkened or blackened makeup to contrast her unnaturally pale skin but match her charcoal hair. Her outfit donned a heavy metal band t-shirt with fonts illegible to anyone who wasn't a fan, black jeans that accented her natural curves with unnatural discomfort, and rainbow-highlighted sneakers. While usually the type to sit at home to watch some film on her computer or catch up on her

schoolwork, she was somehow convinced to join her roommates for a night out after a rather embarrassing breakup from not one but two of her boyfriends. She was caught cheating, and the former men of her life ended up discovering each other after her grandmother revealed the truth.

"Come on, Jacquie!" one roommate shouted, "the guys are almost here!"

"Just a sec, Steph!" Jacquelin huffed.

As I said, she was the type who preferred to stay in the safety of whatever place she called home. Today, it was a five-bedroom house she rented a room from with four other young ladies.

Drip. Drip.

It wasn't the best-looking place. All the ladies in the house were beautiful twenty-somethings who came to Los Angeles to

pursue their careers. Stephanie and Jacquelin happened to meet one day while registering for cosmetology school with hopes of becoming special effects artists. Stephanie, a bubbly and colorful young redhead, seemed the polar opposite of Jacquelin. As the saying goes, opposites attract.

The two became quite close as they were often paired for massive assignments, total bodily overhauls notorious for requiring actors to stay completely still for hours on end. Their friendship blossomed further with the search for a place to stay. Their most inner circle grew to a sisterhood of six upon discovering the house they presently reside. Needing occasional maintenance, such as repairing a leaky bathroom faucet, it was the best they could afford.

With a huff, Jacquie finally emerged from the restroom to be greeted by her eager "Girl Tribe," seconds away from leaving without her. It was a welcoming gesture, especially

as the thoughts were first conceived when the girls first met Abigail when her parents were thrown out. It was a tradition born from Stephanie's vibrant mind that anytime someone in the house had their heart broken, a night out was to be spent! A judgmental pair, Abigail's parents, were, with mindsets akin to the days of old, couldn't adjust to the idea that their son wished to be their daughter.

It's not as if one would notice that there was once a time Abigail went by Alfred. A tall brunette figure disguised by an androgynous appearance was always outgoing and skilled in the arts. Her parents brushed off the flamboyant mannerisms as simple playtime, even finding themselves chuckling at the variety of seemingly joyous outbursts. It was such warmth that Abigail eventually found a somewhat misguided strength to confess her true self.

It is a situation that still haunted Abigail



late at night. As time passed, she would find solace in her best friend turned romantic partner, Grace. Since they were children, Grace and Abigail had known each other, often mistaken as siblings because of their bond and similar appearance. Grace knew in her heart that Abigail was a bit different but accepted her nonetheless. That care and romantic affection saved Abigail's life during a suicide attempt long before they moved into the house.

The remaining two ladies were Mandy and Claire, foster sisters who pledged to always be in each other's lives as they were tossed out into the world by the system when they turned of age. Mandy was much like Jacquie in style and mannerisms, sticking towards either dark shades or bright rainbows that reflected the mood of their morning minds. Claire, on the outside, was practically the embodiment of the stereotypical blonde Barbie that all seemed to drool over. While genetics may have blessed her with such

fine physical qualities, her MENSA-qualifying intellect forged her promising path to technical empires in Silicon Valley.

While all had their own reigns to grasp and paths to take, none of that mattered tonight. The night was simply sisters on the run from stress, ready to scream everything out, forget the world, and simply live.

Drip. Drip.

Outside, the girls could hear the horns of two topless BMWs wailing away as two eager young men hollered in unison. Even though the two gentlemen were respectful to the girls, enough for the ladies to call on them despite never actually dating, they were still men. Who could blame them for the excitement? After all, Jared and Jacob were attractive in their own right, and soon their nice cars would be packed full of gorgeous girls.

The girls divided themselves between the

cars, immediately letting themselves go in the moment as their arms flew to the air as the engines roared. Various pop songs accompanied their journey to one of the hottest nightclubs in Los Angeles. It seemed everyone even remotely interested in California nightlife would vacation just to see. Bright neon signs lit their path like gigantic fireflies in the night, guiding lost travelers to shelter until they came across the crystalline styles of "Kivuli cha Edeni," or Eden's Shadow.

If you weren't for mindless music and booze, the nightclub also housed a casino for betting men, a five-star restaurant with nearly impossible reservations, a theater stage with top-billed performances, and amateur nights for promising talents. For those too inebriated or tired to drive home, there was also a neighboring hotel, pool and spa, gym, and arcade for the little ones.

The establishment prided itself on pro-

viding a safe and fun atmosphere for all. No illegal substances were ever known to flow through its walls. Bartenders were trained to spot potential assaults with coded languages coordinated with private security to help get patrons safely home. There was even private nursing staff equipment with appropriate training to assist with any illness or injury on the premises. Most importantly, special entry and discounts were offered to members of law enforcement of any jurisdiction to sweeten the already open and cooperative communications in the event of unfortunate mishaps. These and other staff perks, along with the openness and swiftness of response on behalf of the company, built a reputation for even the most paranoid and in danger of individuals to feel safe and at home. If home was the definition of a never-ending party to even the most "vanilla" of people, as the kids would say.

The night progressed smoothly and without fret for Stephanie, Jacquie, Mandy,

Abigail, Grace, Claire, Jared, and Jacob. Stephanie and Jacob occasionally drifted into their little world, teasing what the rest of the group already suspected was a blossoming love story. Abigail and Grace took the dance floor without a care for the fact neither possessed any coordination. Mandy and Jared opted to ease into the night's fun by trying their luck on slot machines. Claire and Jacquie relaxed in a private booth the group managed to secure for themselves using Stephanie's seemingly magical ability to persuade some bouncers to let them in.

"Don't you want to get out there a bit?" Claire shouted towards Jacquie, hoping to be heard over the music.

"What?" Jacquie screamed back.

"You should try to let off some steam. It's not healthy for you to bottle everything up!"

"Claire, I'm not ready."

"Jacquie, honey, it's their fault. Men can be assholes and sleep around, so why can't we?"

"You know it's my grandma who told them, right?"

"Bitch please, your grandma is just old! No one has just one fuck buddy anymore," she scoffed, "I bet she was a slut, too, when she was younger."

"CLAIRE!" Jacquie squealed in embarrassment, "No, just NO!"

Claire couldn't help but laugh. "Look, all I'm trying to say is that you need to move on with your life! Stop looking for every little excuse to sit on your fine ass and join the world! You will miss out if you continue to be a pathetic little bitch!" Claire preaches with her hands held in the air, "I know you hate when I talk like this, but you know I

love you. But if you don't get up and embrace life, you might miss out on that big hunk that's been checking you out for the last five minutes.

Jacquie became riddled with confusion. It wouldn't be the first time that Claire tried to rattle someone with her outspoken manner, but one thing she never seemed to lie about was when someone she found attractive was near. Jacquie took Claire's sudden jerks and spasms, adjusting her appearance as the definitive sign that someone was quickly on approach.

"Good evening, ladies," a husky voice muttered, "How is the evening treating you?"

Jacquie slowly looked up in the direction of Claire's astonishment. A tall man of a heavy build was resting a rather large hand on the back of the booth. Well dressed in a form-fitting, yet non-restricting, three-piece suit. The black tones and white button-

up shirt complimented the oak-scented cologne, appropriately groomed stubble, and freshly shaven head. The man didn't seem the type to be overly concerned about his looks. Still, he occasionally took time for personal grooming when the mood struck.

"Umm, we're doing okay," Claire nervously flirted, "I always get anxious seeing how many people come here."

"And this is a slow night," the man joked, "So if the large crowds make you nervous, what brings you two ladies in tonight?"

As the large man glances toward Jacquie with a playful smirk, Claire sighs.

"Girls' night, just to kill some stress," Jacquie answered.

"Oh, a girl's night! Wonderful, wonderful! So am I correct in assuming there are others here with you?" the man asked.



"Yeah, um, I was actually going to go find out where they went," Claire responded, "Can you hold our spot Jacq?"

Jacquie understandably tensed up as Claire got ready to leave their booth. Confused about what to do, the man stood back as Claire brushed against his body and noted a cheeky smirk plastered on her face.

"Some friend, eh?" the man remarked.

"She's ... well, I don't know what she is some days, to be honest," Jacquie sighed.

"Pardon my boldness in stating that she isn't quite a good friend," the man interjected.

"It's not like that. She just..."

"Puts on an act?"

"How did you know what I was going to say?"

"Again, pardon my boldness, but in running this place, you tend to run into all sorts of... interesting people," the man replied, "There's never a dull moment, but after a certain amount of time, one begins to notice patterns. People get predictable."

"So what, did you come over here to try hitting on me because you thought you 'noticed' something?" Jacquie quipped.

"Well, Miss Jacquie, as the owner and CEO of this fine establishment, I occasionally walk amongst the people. Mingle a bit, catch a free show, that sort of thing. I did overhear you resisting the urge to smack Miss Claire."

Jacquie's face began to turn red at the man's remarks, slowly letting her guard down to want to comfortably continue the

conversation. Upon realizing that Jacquie was too embarrassed to continue the discussion, the man quickly thought of another quip hoping to sneak past an anxious woman's mental walls.

"Oh dear, clearly I was right," the man grinned, "Tell me, she suggested that you participate in a massive spank-bank orgy and film it?"

Jacquie lost control and became hysterical at the random joke. Her laughter echoed over the music, signaling to a leering Claire that her impromptu plot to land Jacquie another date was successful. The laughter even lured out the rest of her friends, curious to see the source of the commotion and sudden mood change.

The man sat across from a suddenly cheery and extroverted Jacquie when all were gathered. Not wanting to interrupt the two, the group took to the restaurant for a

late dinner. Mandy took it upon herself to leave Jacquie a text message so they could all regroup and go home, but a sudden reply signaled they could all go home without her. Jacquie was going to be taken up to the owner's private penthouse, possibly for the night.

None of them knew how the man could get Jacquie to let her guard down. The guys took it upon themselves to check into the owner to validate the claim and ensure their friend didn't fall for a false pickup line from an ambitious creep. When the employees they spoke to confirmed that the man was, in fact, the owner, Surtar Olsen (and despite his namesake being a fiery giant from Norse mythology, the man was quite kind), everyone felt at ease and impressed. A combination that often lead to a "dream catch" in today's hookup culture.

On the way to the owner's private elevator, Jacquie's heart began to race as she noticed

a lack of people. Yes, it was supposed to be the man's private penthouse, but the fact so many people came through the place as a whole made it seem like there wasn't somewhere that one could be alone.

"Hey, I know you said it was your penthouse, but how many people have access?" she pondered.

"That depends on the day, I suppose," he answered, "I do have my own office, which is what that light you see there is for..."

As the two enter the elevator, Surtar points towards a faint light on the wall that is separated from the rest.

"Basically, if I am available to chat in person, that light will shine green. Only management quarters have lights set up in the event they need my help with something, which is rare. They all have a phone number that bounces to the office and my cell when

I am not in. Other than that, aside from a few emergency exits that might direct people through the penthouse if all other precautions fail, we shouldn't be bothered," Surtar added.

"Oh, okay," Jacq anxiously sighed, "Sorry, I'm just nervous."

"You're quite alright, dear. It's almost blindly obvious that your need to go out this evening was brought on by something rather upsetting," Surtar assured, "Bad breakup?"

"Yeah," Jacquie stressed, "And my family took his side."

"Ouch," Surtar cringed, "Well, how about this? I can whip us up a nice dinner, put something on the TV, and we can simply get to know one another better. Consider tonight simply a relaxing time with a new friend. If the night leads us to something

more, so shall it be. Because quite frankly, if I may be honest, you are quite stunning."

Sudden blossoming blush on Jacquie's cheeks gave away her answer. It revealed the exit of at least most of her anxieties. The brief conversation and Sutar's charms were enough for Jacquie to be utterly oblivious to the enclosed space she was stuck in with some strange man. She knew it was probably not best to jump into a new relationship so quickly. Still, something about Surtar was just so enticing. Something exciting and mysterious about him made her throw out all logic and reason.

As the elevator doors opened, she was surprised by the view of a long hallway. A green light near one of the doors was enough evidence to reveal where Surtar's office sat. Much to her surprise, she couldn't hear the commotion from the nightclub below them. In fact, all she could hear were the hypnotic vibrations of an air pump underwater.

Through the open window of the office, Jacquie could see colorful arrangements of various aquatic flora and fauna in a large fish tank.

Drip. Drip.

Surtar guided Jacquie towards another door at the hall's end, secured with a number pad and thumb scanner. Upon a successful entry of credentials, the door opened to a luxurious suite Jacquie had thought she'd only ever see in television shows. The living room was illuminated by a large television with the latest gaming consoles, security systems, and high-end satellite TV receivers. The structural designs were reminiscent of ancient civilizations, but Jacquie didn't know which one.

A kitchen area where Surtar began preparing the night's meal nearly glistened as if every appliance and crevice was brand new. Counters were arranged in a large U-shape



to isolate the kitchen from the rest of the penthouse. Shelves of high-end alcohol were not far from the kitchen, with liquids still remaining, suggesting which were Surtar's favorites. Jacquie tried not to judge if someone was a drinker. Still, her previous experience with abusive partners made her a bit cautious.

"Oh, miss Jacquie, before I forget, do you have any food allergies I should know? Just to avoid any unnecessary hospital visits?" Surtar shouted.

"Just, uh, pineapples and strawberries, " Jacquie told him.

"I see. Good to know fruit kinks are off the table."

Jacquie's eyes widened, "WHAT?!"

"Feel free to turn on anything you like; make yourself comfortable!" Surtar replied,

"Plenty to do up here! Hell, if you'd like, the jacuzzi is open. I keep a stash of bathing suits from the gift shop in the restroom that you are more than welcome to take home if you'd like. If none fit, I can get one that does!"

"Pushing your luck, aren't we?"

"Perhaps, but I wouldn't be here without taking a risk or two in life," Surtar grinned briefly before preparing the night's meal, "It should take about 45 minutes before dinner is ready."

As the night progressed, Jacquie became quite comfortable in the presence of a potential new lover. After all, the man was handsome, caring, ambitious, quite successful, and seemingly more considerate than most guys she knew. The smells of lemon, chicken, and a variety of spices that flew through the air from the kitchen made it a

safe bet to assume he was quite the cook as well.

As soon as the lemon chicken graced her tongue, the taste was almost as intoxicating as the white wine paired with it. Being a twenty-something in California made it hard for her to have a quality meal that wasn't prepped and frozen beforehand, at least without exploiting herself to some nighttime hopeful gentlemen. With her guard down, masked by the delicious feast, all reason for her being suspicious was gone and made for what she considered one of the best nights of her life. Her comfort grew to the point she was open to ending this tale with a night of intense, passionate, and almost animalistic sex.

And boy, with every twist and moan, every bit of saliva and spit, every thrust and squeeze, the pure ecstasy that filled Jacquie's body made her forget all her troubles. Each giggle and shout fueled her veins with body-

numbing tingles. Every shriek and scream of organismic release further satiated her hunger for sex. Honestly, this was the most addictive and fulfilling sexual encounter she had known as hours passed by, with no recollection of the surrounding world, only the pulsating tastes of the most exciting man she had known.

Towards the end of those hours, both Surtar and Jacquie fell asleep as Surtar's satin sheets barely covered their purely naked bodies. By the middle of the night, just to run towards the little girls' room, Jacquie awoke, hardly able to walk. Her eyesight seemed to be having trouble adjusting to her surroundings, which wasn't something she was unfamiliar with, being that she was barely awake. Splashing water on her face helped her remember where she had spent the night. She subtly giggled as moments flashed before to remind her of the night's activities.

She could hear Surtar talking in the other room as if he had received a rather serious phone call in the night. 'Probably just work-related,' she thought as she splashed some more water on her face. Surtar's voice seemed deeper than usual, probably just from him being half asleep still. Jacquie could hear him up and about, his voice creeping closer to the bathroom door.

She stared, watching the bathroom door open, hopeful for a surprise continuation of her sex addiction's cravings. Her sight barely adjusted, her mind barely awake just in time for one final surprise. The surprise? Her face was bashed into the bathroom mirror by Surtar.

Jacquie fell to the floor, blood starting to frame her face as it ran down her cheeks. Too stunned to move, she soon realized what was about to happen. Surtar pulled the largest glass shard from the broken mirror and began to slice into whatever piece of Jacquie's

flesh he could reach. Her arms, hands, legs, stomach, breasts, and back all took incredible amounts of pain. Jacquie would plead for her life, asking why Surtar would do such a thing, even bartering that she would not tell anyone what he did to her, all in a fruitless effort.

When Surtar stood tall and looked towards the ceiling, Jacquie mustered what strength she could to try to run. Every part of her seemed cut, torn, and bruised, making every slight motion more excruciating than the first. Despite her condition, she was able to will herself forward. Salt from her tears burned the cuts to her now mangled face. If one unfortunate soul could see her, one that perhaps could've saved her, she was barely recognizable as the woman she was before. She had a fight left in her, and she was ready to do whatever it took to save her own life. But as the ferocious strength of a large, blood-lusting man's arms grabbed her, she knew it was too late.

She tried to thrash about, landing blows too weak to rattle her attacker. To Surtar, this entire event was hilarious. The pure adrenaline that flowed through his veins made the ecstasy he secretly slipped into Jacquie's food and drinks seem like nothing but a light buzz.

"You know," Surtar growled in Jacquie's ear, "The friends that left you here with me are about to die too. Just enough will be left for whatever excuses for a family you have so they can have their funerals for you all, but no one will ever know the truth about what happened to you. No one will know you were here. You will be nothing. Sure I may find some use for your bodies, but you will still be nothing. You are nothing!"

The words might've had a chance to torment Jacquie, but the feel of a man's teeth gripping her throat and silencing her scream was what it finally took for her mind to

completely disassociate. Her shock saved the fear of rapid blood loss and the tear of flesh from her body as it was devoured by Surtar. She could see everything happening to her, but no longer from the perspective of her own eyes. She could feel phantom sensations still, a sign that some part of her was still alive. Something she wished was not true as she watched Surtar put his right hand on the wound in her neck and thrust downward. Was she somehow able to become conscious again, the loud snap was all she needed to know that she would be permanently paralyzed.

"Oh my god, Jacquie!" screamed a familiar voice.

Jacquie turned around to see that Stephanie, Claire, Mandy, Grace, Abigail, Jared, and Jacob were all in similar conditions as her. All were too dumbfounded to truly know what happened, only to be clued in by their sudden ability to move through the wall.



Surtar stood from Jacquie's naked and mangled corpse, proud as ever of his accomplishment. He started to walk towards the kitchen and grabbed a towel to wipe the blood from his mouth, a meat cleaver, and a sharpened ice cream scoop before returning to the corpse.

"What the fuck are you doing, you sick son of a bitch?!" yelled Jacob.

Surtar squatted next to Jacquie's head, wiping the stray hair away from her face. He looks at the eight spirits in the room and smiles.

"Recycling," he jokes.

Surtar used the sharpened scoop to remove Jacquie's eyes from her sockets. Then, he completely decapitated the corpse with one fell swoop of the meat cleaver. The eight

spectral friends watched in horror, wanting to vomit with non-existent organs.

Drip. Drip.

The following morning the neighbors of the six ladies were awakened by the screams of police securing an unspeakable scene. A concerned elderly couple came over to check on the ladies after hearing some commotion overnight. Naturally, they had assumed that one of the ladies was upset over another breakup. What was discovered, though, gave the elderly couple a heart attack. What was later found by another concerned neighbor nearly did the same. What was located on the inside of the house were seven severed heads, all displayed with jaws open and eyes placed on what remained of their tongues. What was discovered on the wall behind the skulls even shook the veteran detectives and forensic crew on the scene.

One of the detectives reached into the

inner chest pocket of his jacket to pull out his smartphone, immediately dialing the one number belonging to who he needed most on this case.

"David, it's me. He's killed again."

Drip. Drip.

That sound seemed to echo through the house from the message left on the wall, in what all could only assume was fresh blood.

### 3

## WHAT I AM...

*All Hands One Love Church* was a sort of "new age" approach to religion, with a mission in mind that many mocked openly. That mission? To unite all faiths, no matter how foreign or recognized, under one banner to spread simple care for each and every person. The founder, Gregory Mills, believed that all peoples were lost in one way or another. He felt that all people were merely trying to find understanding in a chaotic world. To combat this, to attempt to unify all people, Mills took it upon himself to build a library of books with all manners of faith so one can

freely explore the world at their own leisure. He could develop his dream much further than he had anticipated. Much to anyone's surprise, he was quick to gather a following.

There were regular sermons in which Mills took lessons from all the various texts and reimagined them in the modern tongue. One could argue this was the source of Mills' success as it allured hundreds, if not thousands, to his steps when rumors began to swirl of an alleged supernatural vigilante being a frequent visitor. Some who came to realize that David Dragan was indeed the driving force that frightened the Los Angeles criminal underground advised that not taking up some secret identity was probably not the wisest move. After all, innocent people were caught in the middle of his battles because some thug recognized him.

For David trying to hide who he really was seemed irrelevant due to his large stature. Those who did recognize him knew all too

well the potential chaos he could unleash. They were either upon the receiving end of David's might or the endangered innocent David was trying to help.

Gregory had an apartment just above the church, which allowed him to be close by for whoever was in need. Security cameras connected to a smart home device help monitor the premises with almost nonexistent blind spots. This would allow him to monitor everything from his mobile device and set up what times he would want alerts to be brought to his attention. Usually, this was simply part of his nightly routine or whenever he would leave to take care of matters elsewhere.

Volunteers would help operate the stations 24/7, as well as private night security hired by a generous member after some teens broke in one night looking for a quiet place for sex. No charges were ever filed, but the tense emotions of a place of worship

being vandalized had no other way of being subdued.

On this particular morning, Gregory gathered a few materials to attend a PTSD support group he hosted in the church's basement. It was the best place he could offer for all who attended to reflect with minimum distractions and occasional food and beverage to comfort the willing hearts. A notification on his phone sounded off, signaling that the motion sensors picked up activity in the basement. Aside from a couple windows a person of childlike proportions could squeeze through, the only ways into the basement were through the main stairwell and elevator.

Gregory pulled out his phone and tapped on the notification to see what triggered the sensor. He quickly grabbed the bags full of drinks and snacks as he realized that a large-figured man was materializing on camera through a distortion in the image. He started

setting up chairs for the support group. To Gregory, this was a sign that the most famous and potentially most dangerous member was once again active in his crusades, and something almost went wrong. David's brooding manner supported this notion nearly every time.

The giant of a man glanced towards the security camera and grinned, "You coming down any time soon?"

Gregory shook his head and hurried towards the elevator, meeting David right as the elevator doors opened.

"David!" he screamed, "Stop doing that!"

"Greg, I thought you might need some help carrying everything," David smirked.

Greg, shaking his head with a broken breath, handed David a bag with fruits, veggies, and two cases of soda to carry down-



stairs. "And you wonder why people like you were hunted as witches," Greg joked.

"Safe to say there hasn't ever been someone quite like me," David fired back.

"Yeah, yeah," Greg replied as he pressed the button in the elevator, "So what do I owe the pleasure?"

"What? I can't come to church just because?"

Greg shot David a glare.

"Fair enough," David sighed, "I came close to losing control again and almost killed a girl."

"Oh..." Greg realized, "What happened with this one? I assume this has something to do with the diner in this morning's paper?"

David nodded.

"You're not a bad person, David. The things you can do are scary but special all the same. You haven't killed anyone. I know you've done your best to at least physically heal anyone you've hurt. I'm sure that while this girl is probably shaken, whatever you had to do was to protect her," Greg rambled with his almost scripted advice, "You're nothing like your father."

"I know. I just can't shake the feeling sometimes," David nearly whispered.

"Did your dad even have your powers?" Greg asked.

"Kinda," David answered, "These things are genetic. But I'm the first, for some reason, who became this strong."

"There's probably a reason for that," Greg smiled, "Now, who was the girl? Anybody in particular?"

"She was a waitress who happened to be working when the gunman came in."

"Blonde? Pretty?"

David glared at Greg, knowing what he was insinuating.

"Yes," David admitted, "It was a bit frightening how much she looked like..."

"You're fiancé..."

David pauses and waits for the elevator doors to open before proceeding. The loss of his fiancé brought him to Los Angeles in the first place. Not to escape his heartbreak and begin anew but to kill the person responsible. If only he knew the truth.

"It shows growth that you could share this with me in private. But, maybe, you will be

able to heal more if you spoke more openly about it," Greg added.

David looked around the large underground recreation room in the church's basement. At the time, not much was in place, leaving it to be not much more than a storage room. The space was outfitted with secret access points that Greg would use to help hide people looking to escape abusive situations. David knew of the safe rooms and the lengths Greg went to keep them fully operational after he tracked down a young girl who ran from a sexually abusive father. It was a moment in which David saw, for the first time, a kindred spirit looking to help save the world in what ways he could.

It was a moment David finally found a friend.

"Greg, you know I respect you as a friend and a brother. I know you're right," David

sighed, "But I don't know if that is a risk I can take."

"What do you mean?" Greg pushed, "No one here is going to share what you tell them. You're the reason many of them come here in the first place!"

"I never did explain it to you, did I?"

"No, you haven't. I figured you were stalling."

"In a way, I was," David admitted.

Greg shook his head with excitement, expecting that he may finally be breaking through David's emotional walls. His eyes widened, revealing to David all he needed to know without resorting to his supernatural resources. David glanced towards a clock on the southern wall and noticed about a fifteen-minute window to reveal a secret.

"You know how I can read minds, right?" David asked.

"Is there anything you can't do?" Greg replied.

"Actually, I'm not a very strong swimmer," David joked, "But that's not the point."

"Yes, I've caught on. What about it?"

"You ever wonder how that works?"

"I just thought..." Greg paused, "Not really."

"Not many people do. It's not much different from watching or listening to the radio. Our minds can act like broadcasting stations, and the body's own heat can reflect," David explained, "It happens with every living creature. Planets, stars, they all do it too."

"So, you're saying that anyone can do the things you do?"

"In a way, yes. Humans are still very much like infants in their potential," David smirked, "But as most who work with kids can tell you, every now and then, one comes along that's a little too smart. Everyone has some theory for it, from autism to the soul being from another planet..."

Footsteps echoed with the jingles of bells strapped to the church's side entrance leading to the basement. Hesitation filled nearly every step, telling the men there was about to be a new member. David shut his eyes to help focus his attention on his "other" senses.

Most assumed that David's abilities were "just there," never considering how they worked. The veil of confusion added to David's effectiveness when it mattered most. Most would find themselves confused to

hear that his powers were just extensions of his person. David's powers alter the world's senses as one's world is shaped, observed, and cataloged by the many senses that form the human mind. Such an example awaited as the image of a large man suddenly vanished before yet another familiar face made a surprise appearance.

"H...hello?" a nervous woman rattled, "Am I early?"

"Just a little, miss," Greg sighed, "But that's quite alright."

Greg walked towards a young blonde woman who practically radiated anxiety to welcome her to the support group.

"Oh, sorry, I guess I was just nervous about coming. I, um..." the woman stuttered.

"By any chance, would you be Scarlett? Scarlett Argyris?" Greg asked.



Scarlett clutched her purse tight. Tiny jewels clatter against the metals of the purse, forcing David's heart to race as he stood in the shadows. The dust that gathered was irritating to most sinuses.

"Yes," Scarlett answered quickly, "Are you, Pastor Gregory?"

"Yes, dear. And, please, you can call me Greg."

"Can I ask you something then, Greg?" Scarlett muttered, "I read online that the vigilante that's been in the news can be found here. The Dragon... or something. Is it true?"

"Miss Argyris, I can tell you this," Greg smiled, "The people who call him that aren't the ones you may want to associate with."

Scarlett grew confused.

"David!" Greg shouted, "It's rude to spy."

As if he knew David would not disappear from the view of this woman, Greg's voice struck David's nerves. A man with powers beyond understanding was riddled with nerves about meeting a woman he had saved yet again. A woman whose visual image reminded him of a once peaceful time that met a gruesome end. David swallowed his pride, took a deep breath, and stepped into view.

"Hello, Ms.," David said quietly, "I'm surprised to hear that you've been looking for me."

If it were possible to quantify the impact of self-consciousness, David felt in that moment, some may find little surprise to see Scarlett's eyes would likely correlate in size. She was accustomed to those. But seeing the figment of the supposed dreams standing before her was all the evidence she

needed. Perhaps part of her was convinced that night in the diner was merely a strange nightmare. That night was no dream, it did happen, and people came close to death right before her very eyes. The one thing to stop it all, the crushing weight that likely saved her life, was now standing just twelve feet before her.

David knew that look, thus prompting him to speak up.

"Did I hurt you the other night?" he questioned her.

"Um, no, no, no! It's okay," Scarlett muttered, "Just some bruises from the booth, nothing serious."

David moved towards her in utter silence, barely the whisper of breath leaving his nose. His hand nearly cradles Scarlett's arm as David shuts his eyes. A warm, somewhat welcoming glow emanated from his hands

and seemed to seep into Scarlett's skin. David's touch was one of comfort, perhaps even love, making it so Scarlett instinctively knew she had nothing to fear. A tingle radiated through her nerves, and pressure from her bruises seemed to lift. As David released Scarlett's arm, she rolled her cotton sleeves to find her bruises were seemingly just erased.

"How did you..." Scarlett muttered.

"I stimulated your body's metabolic processes to speed up recovery," David whispered.

"Okay, seriously," Scarlett jumped, "What are you?"

Greg stood in awe as it seemed space itself bent between David and Scarlett. Flickers of golden light broke through the veil of air. As they dissipated, Scarlett's cheeks began to brighten.

"What I am..." David muttered, "I'm just a guy with a few tricks up his sleeves."

The flick of David's smile and careful wink penetrated the inner walls of Scarlett's paranoia. Gregory had seen David's charm soothe the traumatized and fearful before. It was a useful trick which helped the recovery of many. It was a war David fought against the criminal underground, and no war goes without innocent casualties. David served as a holy flame in seemingly eternal darkness for many. However, a different sort of heat was sprouting at that moment; one David thought he had lost forever.

Perhaps, even David started to feel a sense of hope he had long lost. Greg could almost hear the strain of muscle on David's face as a smile began to form, followed by the immediate collapse and growl brought by the frustration of a ringing cell phone.

David reached into his pocket, sighed, and answered without uttering a single word.

"David, it's me," a voice echoed through the phone, "He's killed again."

The fortress of David's soul rebuilt its walls, his skin began to glow, and the air around him again seemed to ripple.

"I'll be there soon," David growled as he hung up the phone.

Screams of anger and frustration reverberate from David's mind. Sensing the disturbance, Scarlett grew afraid of what could happen next. Her breaths grew rapid and rattled. Knowing that his power was frightening the woman he had just healed, David took a deep breath and looked her in the eyes.

"Listen," he whispered, "I know you have many questions. You have my word that I will answer as many as I can. But right now, I

need to go. Something worse than what you saw at the diner has happened, and I need to go."

"Are you okay?" Scarlett questioned.

David tilted his head to hide the tears that started down his face. Before he could answer, he teleported from the room, leaving Scarlett frozen in shock. Greg rested his hands on her shoulders for comfort and guided her to a chair in the next room before taking a seat himself.

"What's going on?" Scarlett asked him.

"Sweetie," Greg sighed, "War."

Scarlett growing ever more confused, started to get up and walk out, too overwhelmed with what she just saw to focus. Greg watched her stride, noticing she grew more hesitant with every step. She wanted to leave, but something compelled her to

search for more answers. Greg cleared his throat to catch her attention as she started back up the stairs.

"If you leave," he shouted, "You'll only allow yourself to be hammered by even more questions than you already have."

Scarlett stopped. She knew Greg was right; she would only be more haunted by glimpses of what she had already seen. She needed to know. She needed to know the truth for reasons beyond even her understanding.

"It's okay, Mommy," a little girl cheered, "They will keep you safe."

Scarlett looked at the phantom girl, nodded, and walked back to the chairs where Greg sat.

"You didn't tell me you had a daughter," Greg mentioned.



"It's... uh, long story."

**SKY LIGHT**

February 2015.

Long before the City of Angels became the battleground for modern superheroes, David was a young man from a small town in Idaho. A young man with abilities that frightened most, but a young man still. He was born here, molded here, awakened here. David's family was strongly affiliated with several emergency service agencies across much of the southern part of the state. This often rendered dinner conversations filled with in-depth discussions about whose lives

are forever changed, who lost their lives, and the traumas left. Complaints from citizens of matters which were not illegal in the first place, such as fireworks going off during Christmas or Fourth of July celebrations.

At first, David had little interest in integrating himself into his family's career choices. The situation was far from a television sitcom of family crime fighters if only that were the case. David's mother, Allison, was a dispatcher for four counties worth of police, fire, and medical agencies. David's father, James, was serving a likely lifetime sentence for sexually abusing one of David's many, many siblings. It was widely speculated that David's father abused more people, David included (of which he had little recollection). It was revealed during the investigation that this was far from his first offense. This angered David to the point that he swore to quickly end the investigation into his father's crimes.

After all, no need to waste prison space on a dead man, right?

Because of his parents and the tales of cousins, uncles, and aunts alike, David was well-versed in nearly every aspect of criminal investigation procedure. He was even knowledgeable of court proceedings, often taking full advantage of legal loopholes to advance his interests without bonds. After all, who besides depressed and naive lonely people would take issue with one following their life path? After all, who should care what others do as long as no one is getting hurt?

You could say that was precisely the problem.

In a parking lot of a major retail chain store, we find David leaving with a few bags of groceries. Just a typical day, few clouds in the air, a giant of a man paying no mind to those going about their errands. David was

the type towards the back of the parking lot, furthest away from the store's entrance. He felt it was easier to get in and get out without the hassle of negligent drivers almost running into him. There was the odd occasion when a teenager would come close to knocking him aside while doing doughnuts in the lot or playing on their phone while driving.

This particular day seemed no different. David would occasionally scan the parking lot, usually from him forgetting exactly where he parked or giving a gentle wave to passing children. On this day, he noticed a young woman on the verge of tears as she tried starting her car, parked five spots from his own. The dim glow of rear lights told David that the woman was likely experiencing some electrical problem, hopefully something simple as a dead battery.

As he started to pass the troubled vehicle, another young man, perhaps a couple years

older than David, approached the woman and rested his arm against the hood. David could swear he noticed a malicious smirk on the man's face, warranting careful surveillance in the guise of wasting time.

It was easy to make oneself seem mindless in public. Stopping to connect a phone to a radio via Bluetooth and check emails would buy enough precious minutes to find the precise moment the use of force was justified.

The woman's car shook as the man was no longer visible from above. David had his moment. Casually he exits his vehicle, tucks his phone inside his pants pocket, and approaches the buoyant Buick. The woman's muffled screaming and the man's loose pants dangling by his knees infuriated David much more. His large hands reached into the car, gripping the man's neck with a paralyzing strength, yanking him from the vehicle.

"What the fuck, you faggot?!" the man cried, "You trying to knock me out so you can fuck me?"

"Alan, I told you that we're done!" the woman cried out, "Why can't you leave me alone!"

"We're done when one of us is de..."

For those paying attention, it is pretty obvious that David was no stranger to these matters. Even more understandable as to why he may possess some "sensitivities" around sexual assault. There are those who try to advocate forgiveness of rapists, sodomizers, and pedophiles; perhaps in some hope of finding them help. Those sorts of "urges" often stem from some trauma. David, though understanding the logic, was not one of these people. Maybe if one sought help before committing such life-altering atrocities, then he wouldn't be as headstrong in his stance.

For this, Alan tried mustering an ounce of strength to cover his bare bottom and barely visible micropenis; the nerves throughout his body began to vibrate. His skin crawled as if a large nest of rather angry hornets tickled his flesh in what would become an agonizing swarm. This sensation urged him to try negotiating his freedom, but David's fingers continued to dig into his throat.

Not only was David particularly sensitive about the subjects of domestic violence and sexual assault, but he was a giant of a man with a short fuse and mystical abilities. By every measure, he was dangerous. By every measure, he was still young, angry, had minimal experience in restraint, and a deserving target in his grip. His anger seemed to burn into his mind, and the rage fired in his heart. Alan may have been close to death. That is, had David's attention not been deterred by the sudden burst of flames.



David seamlessly launched Alan to an empty section of the parking lot to keep the flames somewhat contained. Now nude and torn with scraps close to his crotch, Alan paused in an unfamiliar sensation of awe and fright. He was too dumbstruck to begin processing the close brush with death, let alone register the blood seeping from his legs. David centered his sights on the pantless Alan, his focus drawing so much energy it seemed the wind encouraged a final blow, like an excited stadium audience cheering a gladiator to finish a glorious battle and kill his defeated foe. Static rode the winds, setting off car alarms and flickering lights. David stood between Alan's exposed legs in a blink of an eye. His Sasquatch-like heel hovered over Alan's scrotum, slowly pressing downward.

For those who looked on, they might've sworn David took joy in the butchered pig squeals that rang from Alan's lips. The smile that grew with every stomp, each more

powerful and swift than the one before, was the earliest indication that David was morphing into some ferocious animal. Some might've even sworn that they could hear bone being ground into dust, intestines ripping, and asphalt cracking. As David finally felt he had dealt enough punishment, the adrenaline started to fade just enough for him to realize the screams surrounding him. This was far from the first time he lost control. For David, however, this was the first time he had felt remorse for doing so.

Perhaps, one may argue, it was because David had a previous commitment he was eager to attend to. Having to take time to explain to excited police officers, ready to gun him down, worried David about the impression it may leave on someone he loved. That same someone, and the story which led her to meet David, might've been the same reason David took it upon himself to correct his mistake. He looked upon Alan, who was mere minutes from a shock-induced coma

and bent his body forward. Their faces lingered inches from one another, their breaths intertwining in silence.

"I'm going to do you a favor," David whispered, "Listen close. In moments, it will seem that our encounter never happened. Every injury I inflicted upon you will be healed. You will return to where you stood moments before I set my gaze upon you. You and I will go about our business as if we never met, and it will stay that way so long as you do not give me a reason to find you again. Blink if you understand..."

Alan moaned. His eyelids dragged themselves across the surface.

"Good boy," David added, "Know that while it might seem time has reset, you and I will be the only ones who hold any memory. If you try something like this again, you will have flashes of this. If you ever see my face, even if you catch me in the best

of moods, you will shudder at the thoughts that occupy you. And, if I ever find out you have done this again, I will skin you alive and leave your severed head with your eyes in your mouth for whoever still cares about a worthless pile of shit like you. Blink if you understand."

Again Alan complied with the addition of tears to coat his eyes.

"Good," David sighed.

David moved back just three paces as the colors of his eyes faded to nothing but glowing balls of white light. Space seemed to bend and bubble around him, blurring any and all senses. Slowly, as David said, time seemed to reset itself. David was walking towards his car with a handful of groceries. The woman, frustrated with her car troubles, is finally able to get it started. Alan, frozen in shock, stands in the parking lot as he processes what he has just witnessed.

Someone honked their car horn and waved toward him as if a passing friend was greeting him. It was David, inducing the promised shudder to Alan to wake up from his trance.

"Was that necessary?" a voice crept to David's ear, "You're abusing your abilities."

Alan watched as a faint humanoid white light manifested in the passenger seat of the passing car but scurried off without a word. He had enough excitement in one day.

"I know, " David muttered, "But he had it coming."

The white light morphed into an image that could be described only as if David was more androgynous in physical appearance.

"I would be tempted to do the same if in your shoes, but make no mistake, it was wrong to harm him," the Being bellowed.

"Don't take that tone with me!" David roared, "I fixed him!"

"Do you seriously think that is what you did?" the Being asked hastily, "You merely jumped backward in time. The timeline still exists where he dies from the blows you gave him. Do you think that..."

David's eyes flared. "Don't you dare bring her into this!" he screamed.

The being raised his hands in a gesture of surrender, knowing intimately well David was the type to be protective of those he cared about. "Skye is already nervous about seeing you. You know she's afraid that you will be like her ex," The Being reminded him, "That you would hurt the baby."

"You know damn well I would never bring a kid into it..."

"I know that, brother. In all your life-

times, a child in danger has always been the one thing guaranteed to bring about your wrath," the Being teases, "Skye wants to believe it. Her heart tells her to move forward, but much like you, her mind still tortures her. I'd hate to see you lose yourself again in front of her when your charms just might be able to help her *heal*."

His emphasis on the word "heal" sprung a realization into David's mind.

"Are you trying to tell me I can actually heal people?" he asked.

"When it is in your heart, yes."

The being jerks his head as if he can hear someone shouting for him. The shift in his face rings something of importance.

"Remember what I say, and watch for the lights of eyes in Skye..." the Being muttered before disappearing.

Before David could genuinely comprehend the ominous hint of his visitor, a somewhat generic rock song rang from his cell phone and car speakers. His finger shakes as he reaches for the call button on his radio and rattles further as he takes a moment for the Bluetooth to fully connect. He reads the digital display as it reveals the caller, his eyes widening with excitement.

"Hello? David, can... can you hear me?" sang an almost equally nervous voice.

"I'm here, Skye," David answered, "I'm just picking up a couple last-minute things from the store."

"Oh, okay!" Skye nodded, "Listen, my plane came in early. I don't mean to rush you, but how long will it take you to get to the airport? I really need to see you."

"Hey, no worries. Give me about fifteen



or twenty minutes, and I'll be there," David cracked.

"Okay, okay. I'll, uh, be here then!" Skye laughed, "I love you."

A sudden gasp ended the call before David had a chance to reply. The shock from the words he had just heard almost forced his foot to practically embed his car's brake pedal into the vehicle's frame. He and Skye had never said those three words to one another before. Truthfully, the shaking couple was about to meet face-to-face for the first time. Despite the surprise, David managed to churn his nerves into excitement and speed towards the airport. The fifteen to twenty-minute window he had promised turned into a five-minute race.

Skylar "Skye" Oliwa was just a year older than David, a gorgeous Polish brunette of high intellect. Sky's grandparents came to the United States as a young couple looking

to escape the early days of the second world war, settling on the East coast for work, and had three children while in their mid-thirties. The children grew inspired by the times of hardship and their father's stories from when he was both a police and military officer during the war, taking on similar roles in their lifetimes. By the time Skylar was born, most of her immediate family had careers in law enforcement, so she knew little else. A search for justice, sometimes overbearing from family pressures, was in her blood, after all.

Wanting to explore herself during and after high school, a dangerous rebellious phase was fostered within her. During this time, she met and loved a man named Isaac Williams. For reasons Skylar still knew little about, Williams grew violent and possessive. Having developed a dependency on alcohol and illegal narcotics, Williams quickly became a shadow of a man Sky thought she knew. She would eventually be forced

to choose her future when she learned that her being the brunt of violent sexual attacks had sown a brand new baby girl.

Skylar had met David through an online anonymous support group for complex post-traumatic stress disorder survivors. Skylar, the victim-turned-mother, wanted to channel her family legacy and personal experience into a career as a special agent within the FBI. One of her favorite crime-time TV dramas inspired a preference for behavioral analysis, which David thought was funny. When it came time for the blossoming couple to reveal each other's faces through a video call, David spawned an almost immediate, child-like crush because he thought Sky greatly resembled a cast member of that same program.

What drew Skye towards David was the kinship that sparked from having similar backgrounds. David grew up in a law-enforcement family and needed to prove

that he was not like his father. He felt an almost supernatural need to be a protector, to help people learn to fight back against the darkness in the world. Skylar wanted to protect her baby from her choice to get involved with Isaac. She grew fearful of how easy it was for her to fall from grace, in a manner of speaking, and wanted to give her daughter the option to be better. Both were conditioned to see the darkness in man but learned to appreciate the light. For both, their kinship was seen as a chance to be the light others needed. But perhaps they were the light meant for one another?

David's pulse was the only thing he could hear as he scanned through the green-tinted glass windows of the small regional airport. The woman he had waited so long for was now closer than ever, slowly realizing that the man she was eager to meet was standing just outside. Her face morphed into child-like glee, almost forgetting her bags as she rushed outside. It was a magical moment,

seemingly decorated by nature itself, clouds overhead parted just enough to cast a heart of light around them.

During her stay, Skylar and David split the bill at a hotel in town. David's freelancer schedule offered him plenty of time to spoil Sky in every way he thought imaginable, at least in every way he knew would not be too risky to the baby. From catching a film to hiking a few nature trails to mining for gemstones and fossils, even spending a day at the state capital of Boise for even more fun excursions. Much to Skylar's surprise, David had one trick up his sleeve. Nearly anyone might agree with such a move, especially with a child soon to be involved, but David did not care. His youthful excitement and devotion to doing right by this woman rendered him headstrong in his choice.

For upon a hill next to a sparkling lake filled with geese and duck, basking in awe of romantics out on the town to celebrate

Valentine's Day (and frustrations of men being out-done in front of their dates), David slowly propped himself on one knee. Without a ring in hand but a promise of quality the next time they see each other, David managed to stumble through a question meant to set the foundations of a brand new family. Much to her surprise, and without hesitation, Skylar squealed and blubbered, "Yes."

Such memories would likely fill entire photo albums or decorative scrapbooks to serve as commemorative gifts for anniversaries or weddings, especially for one like David, who enjoyed taking pictures. But no such evidence exists! After Skylar had gone home to make last-minute preparations to leave DC to move to Idaho, communication suddenly stopped. David grew fearful of the worst that he had been the object of some love affair. David worried that Skye's response to his proposal was all a lie. He grew angry at her and himself for falling for such

a pathetic and hopeless trap; eventually, he mustered the strength to distract himself with work to get over his lost lover.

Until a moment of silence finally fell upon him. Months had passed, and the fumes from David's perceived betrayal had finally cleared his mind. But his love could not escape his heart. With this lingering love, he took to the internet and began searching for Skylar's full name. The answers to his questioning came without the need to narrow the results. A news article from Washington DC catches his eye with an obituary attached.

"MAN GUNNED DOWN BY POLICE AFTER SLAYING PREGNANT EX-GIRLFRIEND"

As much as he wanted to deny the truth. As much as he wanted to destroy everything in sight, the skylight was no more for David. To remember his love, David only had a single picture taken by screenshotting a

video call. Skylar did not want David to take any photos of her because she believed the father of her child would try hacking his way into David's life, holding him digitally hostage until Skylar came running back. Skylar also believed someone close to her was relaying everything back to Isaac, even suspicions that a new man was in her life.

A plot for vengeance was seeded, and David needed some way to learn more. David also recalled a rather unusual name Skylar mentioned, thinking it to be some hitman for the gangs Isaac associated with. This name would not leave his mind, burning itself deeper with every moment it would arise...

Knightmare.



## **IN ACT 2**

April, 2015.

Boise, Idaho.

A small group of young ladies are nervously walking up the street, through a local university campus. Though still slightly chilly, the weather was nice and people scurried about the city going about their days. This day in particular was special for many young movie star hopefuls, as a producer from a major Hollywood studio was in town, scouting for new talent. A nightclub owner was accompanying him, sponsoring the search and offering both lodging and part-time work at his facilities to help the hopefuls get settled in the Hollywood lifestyle. For the average collage student, looking for a break into super stardom, this was a one-in-a-million shot for dreams.

Among the crowd was 21-year-old Scarlett Argyris, nervously awaiting her turn to audition. The lines were accomodated with interns from the major studio handing out bottles of water and bits of various fruits for snack. As she creeps through the line, watching those leaving the scene in tears, her nerves begin to rattle. In her pocket a playful song started on its own, a ringtone set just for the purpose of identifying Scarlett's older sister, Violet. Scarlett quickly pulls out her phone to answer, hopeful that her sister would offer words of encouragement in spite of an argument that transpired mere hours before.

*'Hey!' Violet squeels over the phone speaker, 'Did you manage to audition yet?'*

"No, not yet. They started handing out some snack for those of us still waiting."

*'Still waiting? How many people actually showed up?'*

"A couple hundred from the looks of it," Scarlett sighed, "Not everyone is a cynic about opportunities like this."

*'Hey, I'm sorry about this morning, Scar. It's just - well - the thing just sounds too good to be true! And this nightclub guy, something doesn't sit right with him! How many businesses he owns, every single one has had somebody go missing from them! And you've heard the stories about Hollywood guys being fucking creeps.'*

"Yeah, I know, but there's also a lot of really amazing people out there too! Don't try to ruin this for me!"

*'Scar, Scar...'*

"Don't 'Scar, Scar' me! You've always done this! I am done! Don't ever call me again!"

Not wanting her feelings towards an un-supportive sister to ruin her shot at stardom,

hardly having listened in the first place, Scarlett immediately hung up her phone and set it to Airplane mode to prevent any further calls from coming in. Scarlett and Violet always had a competitive relationship, as most siblings could probably relate. However to Scarlett, Violet seemed to always overstep her boundaries. Violet seemed to feel as if she was supposed to fill in for their absentee mother, driving Scarlett insane. Even after moving to the midwest for a new boyfriend, Violet still tried to put herself in that role. Perhaps on a subconscious level Scarlett felt that if she put up with it, maybe something would break through and she could just have a normal sister.

But no more. This was her time to break free, to forge her own destiny.

If only she was wise enough to choose a few different final words to her overbearing sister...